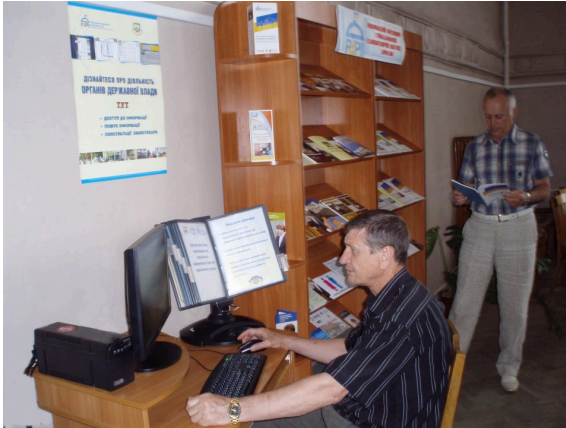


Libraries as Citizen Access Points: Connecting Ukrainian Citizens to their Policy Makers

As of August 2012, 673 libraries across Ukraine have joined the Citizen Access Points (CAPs) network, which allows citizens to find official government information, read and comment on draft laws and regulations. CAPs is a joint project of [USAID's Parliamentary Development Project's \(PDP II\)](#) and the [Ukrainian Library Association](#), which grows a network of libraries that receive internet access, hardware and software through the U.S. Embassy's [LEAP program](#) and the Bill and Melinda Gates/USAID [Bibliomist – Ukraine Global Libraries Program](#).



Visitors using the resources of the CAPs at the Mykolaiv Oblast Universal Scientific "Hmyriov" Library
(Photo: Larysa Trehub)

CAPs sites have been centers of active citizenship for several years. They provide consultations on where to find official government information, and promote legal literacy and civic responsibility through exhibits, events, and trainings. More recently, they have also been at the forefront of testing the Government of Ukraine [website](#) designed for an interactive dialogue between the Government and citizens on draft laws and regulations. Using this platform, citizens can read the text of proposed legislation and weigh in with their thoughts and policy priorities. The site also allows experts in the community to participate in assessing drafts – a helpful development that improves citizens' and NGOs' ability to assess policies that affect them and share their concerns or support in their development.

In addition to work in their communities, CAPs network members have participated in national projects, from competing in a [Bibliomist](#)-sponsored innovation competition to exhibiting at the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) e-governance fair, working with the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Spirituality to improve the condition of rural libraries, and partnering with the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine promoting the work of Civic Councils of state and local bodies in a [quarterly bulletin](#) as well as on the [Government Public Outreach site](#). Network members have also developed coursework for library school students called *Libraries and E-Governance*, which is being used to teach at the Luhansk Institute of Culture.



Partners in Library for Community Development: Librarians visit the *Bibliomist*, PDP II, and Ukrainian Library Association (with CAPs poster displayed) booths at the 2012 Library Innovations Fair in Kyiv (Photo: R. Koval)



Library patron using the CAPs resources at the Kirovsk Central City Library (Photo: Svitlana Salnyk)

The [USAID PDP II](#) project began developing the CAPs network in 2009. The project sought to help Ukrainian citizens nationwide better understand where to find information on legislative development and how their representatives were performing. At that time, the USAID project began working with libraries and youth, community, and media centers to set up these access points, and trained site managers on how to effectively

track government and legislative information on the web. Over the course of a few years, the project has grown into a nationwide network that helps people gain access to information and more easily interface with their government. Network members receive regular distributions of printed and electronic resources produced by the Ukrainian Government, the Committees of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, as well as those produced by USAID projects, including the [USAID FAIR Justice Project](#), the [USAID Counter Trafficking Project](#), the [USAID Municipal Finance Strengthening Initiative](#) and others.

Recent testimony to CAPs ability to influence the legal literacy in the community comes from the Kirovsk Central City Library in Luhansk Oblast where earlier this year CAPs consultants helped a pensioner to prepare an appeal to the local courts regarding her rights to affordable communal services. After her original appeal was dismissed, the plaintiff organized a group with similar complaints and based on the information available in the CAPs and with pro bono legal assistance provided in the library, was able to prepare an application for review in the European Court of Human Rights which is currently under review.

CAPs network librarians also share their experiences and ideas on a [blog](#) run by the Ukrainian Library Association. The Association also monitors effectiveness of the CAPs government information reference services, identifying problems and working together to find solutions or provide feedback to government agencies about problems encountered when using their websites. CAPs partners also participate in social media discussions on [Twitter](#) and have their own [Facebook page](#).

A full list of participating libraries can be found here: [Libraries with CAPs services](#).